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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000912

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The weekend's major event was the Hamas strike on the Kerem Shalom crossing on Saturday. Media characterized it as a "hit and grab" aimed at capturing and killing soldiers that was only thwarted by

the quick instincts of a Bedouin IDF commander. The attack, which left three Hamas gunmen dead and 13 IDF soldiers injured, involved an armored personnel carrier that Israel had given to Yasser Arafat's forces. Israeli forces killed an additional seven Palestinians in subsequent air strikes. As a result of the recent Hamas targeting of the Gaza crossing, the media reports that Israeli has closed all of the crossings to reevaluate security arrangements.

The Jerusalem Post quoted defense officials as saying yesterday that Israel did not plan to alter an earlier decision to permit the PA in the West Bank to receive 25 APCs from Russia.

Major media quoted Syrian President Bashar Assad as saying yesterday during a meeting with Ba'ath Party officials that he has exchanged messages with Israel through a third party to explore the possibility of resuming peace talks. Assad was quoted as saying: "Israel knows well what is accepted and not accepted by Syria." "Syria rejects secret [direct] talks or contacts with Israel... Anything Syria does in this regard will be announced to the public," Assad added. Leading media reported that Assad raised the possibility of armed conflict with Israel. Speaking on Israel Radio this morning, former Meretz head and former cabinet minister Yossi Sarid called on Israel to ignore President Bush's directive and engage in direct talks with Syria.

Leading media reported that former U.S. President Jimmy Carter has proposed a truce between Israel and Hamas. Media cited a report in the Hamas newspaper Falastin, published in Gaza, that Carter proposed that Hamas unilaterally stop rocket fire on Israel and release Gilad Shalit in exchange for no more targeted assassinations of its leaders and the release of 400 prisoners. Ha'aretz reported that Hamas rejected Shas cabinet minister Eli Yishai's offer of talks. Israel Radio quoted Carter as saying this morning in Jerusalem that he could bring a letter from Shalit to his parents. Electronic media quoted Carter as saying that Hamas is prepared to accept Israel's right to "live as a neighbor next door in peace." Electronic media quoted Carter as saying that Hamas won't undermine Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's efforts to reach a peace deal with Israel. He said Hamas is ready to accept a Palestinian state the West Bank and Gaza.

Speaking on Israel Radio, MK Tzachi Hanegbi, Chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, said that it was not possible for Israel to negotiate with Hamas amidst attacks like the one on Saturday.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday the IDF decided to investigate the death of Fadel Shana'a, the Reuters cameraman killed in Gaza by Israeli tank fire on Wednesday. The Jerusalem Post quoted the IDF as saying that its investigation would be reviewed by the Military Advocate-General.

The Jerusalem Post reported that determined to help alleviate the country's water crisis, the Jewish National Fund is launching a "311 Days for Israel" campaign that aims to raise \$2 million during the month of May to build more reservoirs.

The Jerusalem Post cited a Jewish Telegraphic Agency report that the Solomon Project, a Washington-based organization, has brought a group of influential liberal American bloggers to Israel to educate the "news media." The Jerusalem Post reported that the UK's University and College Union will again consider a boycott of Israeli academic institutions.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Florida-based Lawrence Dermer, one of America's most successful songwriters and producers, is working on a new CD, "Israel@60."

All media, except the ultra-Orthodox dailies, reported that theater persona Nissan Nativ passed away in Tel Aviv yesterday at 86. Nativ was named winner of the 2008 Israel Prize earlier this year. Nativ was the founder of a renowned acting school, which held classes both in Tel Aviv and a Jerusalem

Maariv reported that Haifa's Arabs are refurbishing the tomb of Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam (d. 1935), the spiritual father of Hamas's military wing.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Editor-in-Chief Amos Regev wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom: "Israel must now remove the constraints it placed on itself.... The target should be the elimination of Hamas as a fighting force."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Hamas is becoming a strategic player among Arab countries, and is influencing Israel-Egypt ties."

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in Ha'aretz: "Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's mission to see Damascus-based Hamas leader Khaled Mashal is placed in a particularly ludicrous light when, farther down in the organization, Hamas operatives set out to take more Israeli soldiers hostage."

Military correspondent Yaakov Katz wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "After Bush leaves and the last of [Israeli Independence Day's] fireworks are lit, Israel's hands will be untied. It will also already be the middle of the summer, which is a prime time for war."

Zalman Shoval, a senior Likud member and former ambassador to the U.S., wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The body that effectively guarantees the continuation of Syria's status in Lebanon is Hizbullah, which obeys Iran. How conceivable is it to see President Assad take the risk of losing such leverage?"

Ha'aretz editorialized: "The art of concealment serves the ruling authorities well by hinting that great things are being done clandestinely, and therefore the public must allow the government to continue along the same road."

Block Quotes:

I. "A 'Restricted Conflict' Only Restricts Israel"

Editor-in-Chief Amos Regev wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom (4/21): "Hamas's Saturday offensive, on Passover eve, should light a bright red light among Israel's political and military decision-makers. For years politicians and senior military assumed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a 'restricted conflict', that is to say an asymmetrical conflict, in which the Israeli side -- a strong sovereign state with a large army -- deals with guerrilla and terror organizations in an asymmetrical conflict.

The strong side places constraints on its use of force, because this isn't an all-out war. This is how the United States conducted its 'limited conflicts,' all of which failed.... Israel must now remove the constraints it placed on itself. The IDF must be given the goal of eliminating Hamas and to materialize that goal in the only way befitting the strong side: an all-powerful ground offensive ... that will kill the greatest possible number of terrorists and destroy the entire arsenal of rockets and explosives. The target should be the elimination of Hamas as a fighting force. Later, mediators could succeed in transferring the area to some international body: the UN, NATO, the Arab League, or Egypt. Israel should not agree to the 'Lebanonization' of Gaza, because it would be followed by the West Bank's 'Lebanonization.'"

II. "One Stage or Many?"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (4/21): "[Hamas leaders] Khaled Mashal, who is based in Damascus, and Mahmoud al-Zahar, in Gaza, want a comprehensive deal to show a sorely needed political achievement. However, the Prime Minister in, Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas, believes the issue of the crossings can be solved separately.

His aides say that he will agree to a cease-fire independent of the other demands, as long as it is bilateral. Hamas is becoming a strategic player among Arab countries, and is influencing Israel-Egypt ties. This is because Cairo wants a quick solution to the crossings so that its border with Gaza is not breached again.

If this were to happen, it would make Egypt responsible for the Palestinians in the Strip. But the crossings will not open without Hamas consent."

III. "An Important Success"

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in Ha'aretz (4/21): "Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's mission to see Damascus-based Hamas leader Khaled Mashal is placed in a particularly ludicrous light when, farther down in the organization, Hamas operatives set out to take more Israeli soldiers hostage. Carter's mission harmed his preferred presidential candidate, Democrat Barack Obama. A few hours after the attack, Republican candidate John McCain lashed out at Obama for refusing to criticize Carter's meeting with Hamas, while Hamas operative Ahmed Yousef made headlines with the statement, 'We like Mr. Obama and hope he wins the elections.' Meanwhile, even President George W. Bush seems no longer to believe his own declarations about an Israeli-Palestinian agreement this year. General William Fraser, who was appointed to oversee the implementation of the Roadmap after Annapolis, toured the region for a while, was insulted by Defense Minister Ehud Barak's cold shoulder, and left to seek results elsewhere."

IV. "Waiting for a Hot Summer in Gaza"

Military correspondent Yaakov Katz wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (4/21): "The assessment in the defense establishment is that attacks against the crossings as well as along the border fence -- like the one last week in which three ... soldiers were killed -- will continue and possibly escalate in the coming weeks. Despite this assessment and calls within the IDF to move from a 'defensive mode' of repelling Hamas from the border to an 'offensive mode' -- a widespread invasion into Gaza -- defense officials admitted over the weekend that the chances of a large operation were slim to none for at least two months. This is mainly due to May's scheduled visit by U.S. President George W. Bush. There are also the nationwide 60th anniversary celebrations. After Bush leaves and the last of the fireworks are lit, Israel's hands will be untied. It will also already be the middle of the summer, which is a prime time for a war. "

IV. "So, Run to Damascus"

Zalman Shoval, a senior Likud member and former ambassador to the U.S., wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/21): "Further to the desire of some Israelis to view [Syria's President Bashar Assad] as a fleeing counterbalance to the Palestinian track, there is wishful thinking that if we reach a peace agreement with Damascus, the latter would at once disengage itself from Tehran. This theory isn't borne out by reality -- among other things because Iran acts for the minority, Shi'ite-related, Alawite regime as an insurance policy against the threat of the Sunni majority. Furthermore, the body that effectively guarantees the continuation of Syria's status in Lebanon is Hizbullah, which obeys Iran. How conceivable is it to see President Assad take the risk of losing such leverage?"

VI. "Hollow Interviews"

Ha'aretz editorialized (4/21): "The series of holiday interviews given by the Prime Minister were meager in information and plentiful in promises, which in the meantime are without foundation. Iran will not have a nuclear bomb, Ehud Olmert intends to win the next elections, and a peace agreement with Mahmoud Abbas will be attained within a year. The new method of government introduced by Ehud Olmert, under the inspiration of Ariel Sharon, is one in which more goes on than meets the eye. The Prime Minister feels no obligation of public accountability, does not give interviews but delivers speeches instead, and reports to the Knesset so minimally as to offend its honor. The art of concealment serves the ruling authorities well by hinting that great things are being done clandestinely, and therefore the public must allow the government to continue along the same road."